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The political representation for minor: A poll survey for Italy

Democracy, the “Mill’s dilemma” and the proxy-vote proposal

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1. The “Mill’s dilemma”

The lack of minors’ political representation is a missing link of modern democracies, which hampers the long-term decisions required for a sustainable development and widens social inequality, preventing a level playing field from the birth, but rather trapping children of low income families in a poverty cage. Pediatricians, psychologists, neurophysiologist, researchers agree that the early years of childhood are fundamental for cognitive and behavioural traits, defining a lasting adult personality, including education levels and income. Indeed, investment in early childhood brings about a high rate of economic return in the US, human capital wealth is highly correlated with GDP per-capita (World Bank), and for the countries of the European Union GDP per-capita is associated to a high level of human capital, measured as the share of GDP devoted to the tertiary education.

While a broad consensus exists on the positive externalities stemming from education and investments in early childhood, economic and social policy is instead mute on the large gap between private and social investment, which instead would call for a redistribution of resources, in-kind or monetary, to the children and their young families, when family income fall short.

On the basis of the principle one-person-one-vote, the number of votes would matter within any form of democracy:

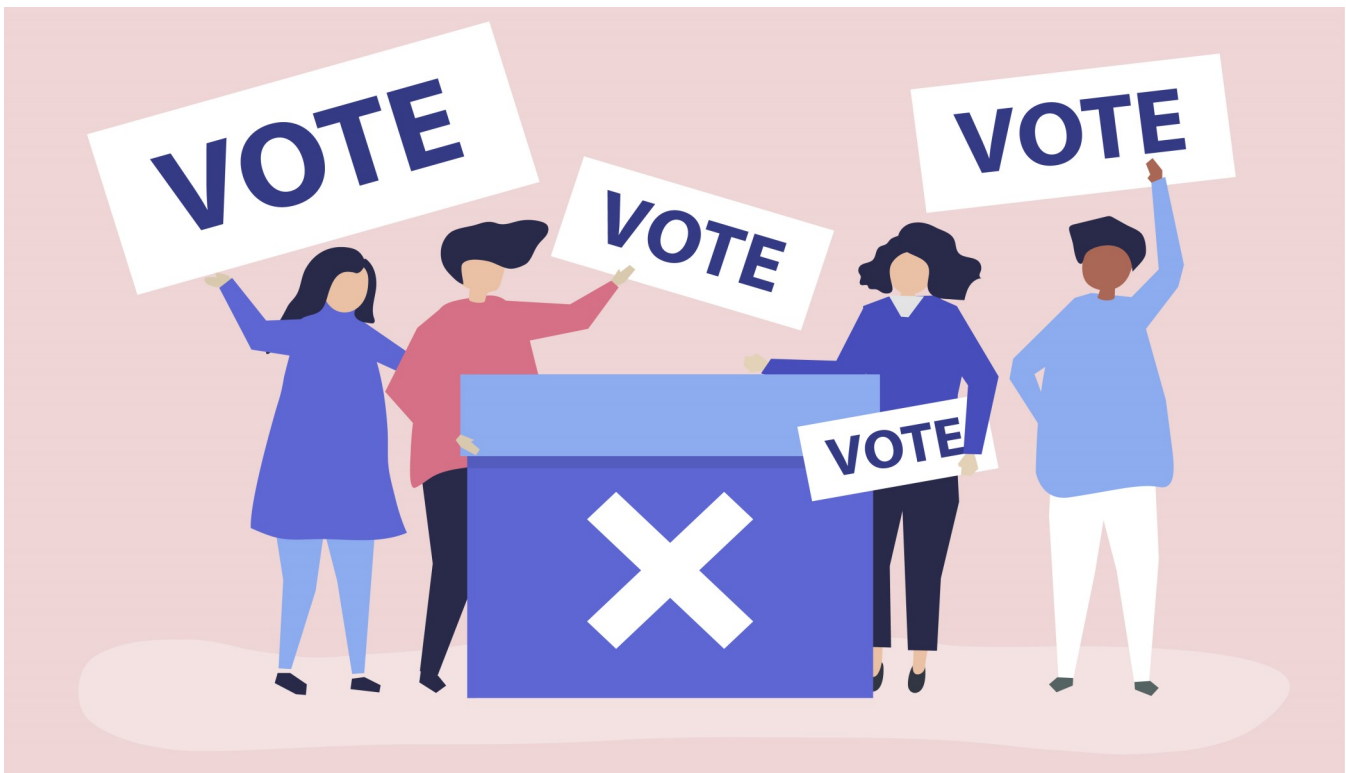


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historically political suffrage has become gradually extended, from the man to the woman, but age discrimination against the minors still remain, just when the goal of sustainability would require a long-term vision of the politics, precisely embedded in the early childhood and the minors. The problem is increasingly recognized by a growing number of people and scholars, but the majority required for a change of constitutional rules collides against the political status quo and the majority required for a political change. Self-induced social decline is a well-documented historical fact, when short-term private interests prevail over long-term collective interests in the long run. The political dilemma between short and long run is neatly defined by John Stuart Mill in "Representative Government" when argues, back in 1861, that "rulers and ruling classes are under a necessity of considering the interests and wishes of those who

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have the suffrage; but of those who are excluded, it is in their option whether they will do so or not; and however honestly disposed, they are in general too fully occupied with things which they must attend to, to have much room in their thoughts for anything which they can with impunity disregard" (pp. 329). Rules which incentive to disregard the minors are equivalent to a strong preference for the present over the distant future: the English saying "a bird in the hand is better than two in the bush" is the essence of the dilemma discussed by John Stuart Mill, which can be dubbed "the Mill's dilemma".

Lowering the voting age of the minors is a clear improvement of democracy because reduce the age discrimination of the franchise, but it cannot address the problem of the age lower bound: it would be meaningless to put on the same level a toddler and an adolescent teenager.

2. Rosmini and the "Mill's dilemma"

Constitutions are solemn declarations which define a set of common values and rules to be shared by each member of a community: it can be thought as a universal suffrage, or a social contract, by equal persons which unanimously agree on values and rules for the present and future generations, without discriminations.

The first proposal, of which we are aware, of a Constitution which include a proxy-vote for the children was first advocated in 1848 by Antonio Rosmini, an Italian priest and philosopher, whose writing were admired as well controversial in his time: he joined the intellectual debate about Italian unification and his work "The Constitution of Social Justice" was translated in English.

In 1848, when franchise were still a privilege for wealthy people he proposed the draft of a Constitution including the proposal of the universal suffrage for men, (in Italy universal suffrage for men was only introduced in 1918 and the universal suffrage for the women in 1945) and the proviso for each men of a proxy vote that each man could cast for each woman and child of his family. In the first half of the twentieth century universal suffrage for adult men and women spread: the economic growth of "the glorious thirty years" following World War II rose more clearly the issue of the living conditions for the minors and the children. On one side childhood mortality declined, on the other side children have been suffering an increasing and systematic poverty: the issue is widespread in all countries and the issue of their political representation is now raised as a matter of democracy. The "Mill's dilemma" is still unresolved.

The democratic issue is hidden in various forms: the Italian

Constitution explicitly prohibits discrimination related to the sex, race, color, language, religion, political opinion, without including age discrimination, which, according to law scholars, should therefore implicitly included in the statement which follow, stating that “It is the duty of the Republic to remove those obstacles of an economic or social nature which constrain the freedom and equality of citizens, thereby impeding the full development of the human person”. For this reason some law scholars call age discrimination the “Cindarella factor”. We can associate this formal statement with the famous assertion of Pietro Calamandrei: “The Constitution must be farsighted, it has to look to the long-term, without being myopic”. The problem is to design a political mechanism which award the long view: the following poll survey assess the public opinion in Italy on the proxy-vote as a possible solution to the “Mill’s dilemma”.



3. The survey

An opinion poll was carried out on February 2019 on a sample of 1000 citizens residing in Italy: the sample, asking 20 questions about children life, was representative of the Italian population from 18 to 75 years, and stratified according to gender, age, education, employment type and status, geographical area and city size, self-assessed political stance, number of children and religious behavior. The focus of the following analysis are the answers on the issue of the proxy-vote, covered by three specific questions, whose statistical analysis is carried out by using Generalized Linear Models: in the following we show only the results statistically significant at a level of 5%.

4. Results

Question 1 (“Mill’s dilemma”)

In Italy there are about 10 million minors. If they too, through a representation, could cast a vote, do you think that the programs of political parties would change, taking more into consideration the needs of minors?

73% ($\pm 3\%$ with a confidence level of 95%) of citizens agree with the question, saying that the programs of political parties would change, giving more consideration of the needs of minors, if they too could indirectly cast a proxy-vote;

- more men (76%) than women (70%) agree

- more people graduated from high school (79%) agree than people with lower education (70%)
- more people in the Central Italy (78%) agree than in the South and the islands (70%)
- more people of the working class (81%) than white collars (70%)
- more center-right voters (83%) agree than right-wing voters (71%)

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The level of agreement significantly depends on the male gender and on the center or center-right political orientation (as shown by using a Log-Poisson model with robust variance estimation).

Question 2 (Rosmini - proxy vote)

Some propose that the parent vote not only for himself but also for the children which means that in a family with two adults and two children the votes in the elections would be 4 instead of two as it is now. How much do you agree with this proposal?

- a) 24% ($\pm 3\%$ with a confidence level of 95%) of citizens favor a proxy-vote to the parents for their children;
- b) the percentage in favor is highest (37%) for the young adult (18-30) and lower (16%) for the older (65+)
- c) more self-employed (36%) are in favor than retired (11%)
- d) more center-right voters (32%) are in favor than those of center-left (21%)
- e) parents who have only minor children (32%) agree more than parents who have only adult children (17%)
- f) people going to mass once or twice a month (37%) agree more than those going every Sunday (23%)
- g) the level of agreement significantly depends on the

young age and on the frequency of mass (as shown by using an ordinal Logistic model).

Question 3 (proxy-vote)

Let's assume that parents can also vote on behalf of their children from when they are born until they turn 18. In your opinion, which of the two parents should have the responsibility to vote for their children? If you were to choose one which one would you say?

a) 63% ($\pm 3\%$ with a confidence level of 95%) of citizens would favor the proxy-vote for the mother;

b) more women (72%) than men (54%),

c) more housewives (70%) than retired (60%)

d) more left-wing voters (78%) than right-wing voters (64%)

e) more parents who have only one child (69%) than parents who have two children (54%)

f) single (74%) are more in favor than couples with children (60%)

g) the affirmative answer significantly depends on the female gender and on the left-wing political orientation (as shown by using a Logistic model).

5. Conclusions

Our results show an overly majority advocating a political representation for the minors, implying a universal suffrage since the birth: should a proxy-vote for the parents already

be a constitutional rule an absolute and qualified majority of people would choose, as a rule, the mother. Why, then, Italy has not approved a constitutional change granting such rule? The survey allows also to give a rational explanation for this apparent inconsistency, looking at the answers of the following question: "What is, in your opinion, the most important period for the human formation from birth to 18 years?" The

percentage of answers of the entire sample according to the perceived importance of the ages class of the minors is the following: 8% (0-5 years), 26% (5-10 years), 32% (10-14 years), 29% (14-18 years), 5% (don't know). According to the answers the most important age period for the children is 10-14 years, which however is totally at odds with the consensus of scholars and researches, proving the powerful

importance of early childhood, surely in the range of 0-5 years, usually not trespassing the 6-10 years, on the following life behaviour when adult. Parents should be better informed of the crucial importance to be as close as possible to their children during their childhood: government decision are instead fully aware of this information and should rationally provide a substantial support for the positive externalities of healthy and educated future adults. The answer by age of the Question 2 show another major result: the agreement for the proxy-vote is highest for the young adult (18-30 years), lowering steadily with age, which means that an aging society is blocking a social innovation which would go to the benefit of all. Lowering voting age to 16 would be a clear improvement for democracy, pushing the vote of the young (16-30) for the proxy-vote closer to the majority.

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"Today in Europe only 28.4% of households have children and only 13% of families have three or more children. The political weight of families with children, and of large families in particular, is clearly insubstantial and their demands unattended. Children are not the core of the political debate. To recognise the children's right to political representation not only brings universal suffrage to fulfillment but it also restores a numerical fairness that the demographic trends have endangered. By delegating the right to vote to parents with a proxy-vote and lowering the age limit to 16, families and children will be able to influence the political choices that affect them and the future of everyone."

Regina Maroncelli, president of ELFAC